

# FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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## THE REAL REVOLUTION IN SOUTH VIET NAM

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**S**OUTH Viet Nam, as is obvious to anyone with the most cursory interest in world affairs, is in the midst of a war, and equally obvious is the fact that this war is being waged by a Communist-controlled insurgent movement supported and directed from Hanoi. Less obvious, but equally important in determining its political complexion and future (including, ultimately, the outcome of the Communist-instigated war) is the fact that South Viet Nam is also in the midst of a social revolution.

When South Viet Nam was created in 1954, political authority was initially assumed by a predominantly mandarinal class, largely French-educated and foreign-oriented in culture even though politically nationalistic. Of that class, Ngo Dinh Diem was both symbol and archetype. Today political power is in the process of passing to a more militantly "Vietnamese" group, at least latently xenophobic and, in some ways, more culturally autochthonous, far less prone to think about politics in a foreign idiom. Of this group, the students, the bonzes (monks) who lead the "Buddhist" movement and the military "Young Turks" are prime examples. This shift in the locus of political power explains much of the otherwise baffling turbulence on the South Vietnamese political scene and constitutes the real revolution in South Viet Nam. The Communist insurgency has contributed to the climate and circumstances which produced it, but the two are not the same. The insurgency is and always has been a contrived and consciously directed politico-military campaign. South Viet Nam's social revolution is something much more formless, much less the result of deliberate intent and much less amenable to anyone's control.

This revolution is a thing of manifold complexity in which nationalist sentiments, for example, are complicated by cross-currents of regionalism and in which contending factions bear religious labels even though no issue of religious doctrine or practice is really involved. So far, it has been largely confined to urban centers and as yet has had relatively little effect on the lives of the peasantry who constitute the bulk of South Viet Nam's population. This fact may condition its outcome and ultimate impact but does not alter its present importance. Though a small minority in terms of numbers, the literate and vocal urban populace has a predominant influence over South Vietnamese politics—a situation which, so far, has kept the peasantry from feeling a sense of direct identification with the fortunes of any Saigon régime and has been one of the Communists' principal assets. To understand the revolution now taking place and the emotions it involves, to assess its import and its relationship to the Communist insurgency, one must appreciate the historical context in which it developed. It was this context which made Diem's Catholicism a catalytic factor, caused his opponents to rally under the banner of "Buddhism" and gave the bonzes who direct the "Buddhist" movement the political influence they exercise today.

II

Contemporary religious animosities in South Viet Nam have deep historical roots. During the past three centuries, the close and often causal relationship between Catholic missionary activity and French political encroachment created strong emotional tensions and not always latent hostility between Catholic and non-Catholic Vietnamese, emotions similar in many regards to the feelings between Catholic and non-Catholic Englishmen in the days of Elizabeth I and her Stuart successors.

If we discount an occasional earlier traveler and a few sixteenth-century Portuguese traders, the Jesuits were really the first Europeans to become systematically and permanently interested in Viet Nam.<sup>1</sup> The attention of the Jesuit Superior in Macao was

<sup>1</sup> The territory denoted by "Viet Nam" in any historical discourse varies with the time period under consideration. At the beginning of the Christian era the ethnic Vietnamese were largely confined to the Red River delta. The coastal plains between the Red River and Mekong deltas were dominated by the kingdom of Champa, whose seat was originally north of Hué. South of the Chams lay the shadowy kingdom of Fu Nan, of which little is known save that it disappeared around the sixth century A.D. under pressure from the precursors of the Khmers who were, in turn, the ancestors of the modern Cambodians. The gradual southward push of the ethnic Viets down the coastal plain and into the Mekong delta constitutes the *leitmotif* of recorded Vietnamese history. It took eighteen centuries to complete. During its course, the

directed to Viet Nam after the priests under his charge were expelled from Japan in 1614. A mission was established the following year at the port of Fai Fo (near modern Da Nang) in the Nguyen principality. Its success encouraged the Macao Fathers to expand their work into Trinh-ruled Tongking, and in 1627 Father Alexandre de Rhodes went to Hanoi. The efforts of this remarkable man (who helped to perfect *quoc-ngu*, the diacritically marked roman script in which Vietnamese is now written) materially influenced subsequent Vietnamese history. In 1645 he went to Rome to seek assistance for Catholic mission endeavors in Indochina and suggested that the work be carried on by local priests ordained and supervised by European bishops directly responsible to the Pope. While Innocent X pondered this ingenious suggestion (politically delicate because it ignored Portuguese claims on ecclesiastical patronage), Father Alexandre, a Frenchman by birth, went to Paris to recruit personnel and raise funds to execute his eventually adopted proposal.

His appeals fell on receptive ears, partly because influential nobles and merchants were already casting covetous eyes at the Portuguese-Spanish monopoly of Indochinese trade. They ultimately resulted in the consecration of two French priests as Bishops and Vicars Apostolic, one of Tongking, the other of Cochin China (*i.e.* Nguyen-held Annam), as well as the founding of what became the powerful and politically influential Société des Missions Etrangères. While pursuing his religious objectives, in short, Father Alexandre initiated French interest in and association with Indochina.

Chams were virtually exterminated (the last vestige of an organized Cham court vanished in 1720) and the Mekong delta wrested from the Khmer/Cambodians. The latter, however, was a fairly recent development. Vietnamese colonization of the Mekong region did not really begin until the seventeenth century, Vietnamese suzerainty over the area was not seriously essayed until the eighteenth century, and not until the early nineteenth century (1802) did a single Vietnamese ruler's writ really run from the Camau peninsula to the China border.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Vietnamese rule extended to the present province of Quang Nam in South Viet Nam. Though there was a Le dynasty king of what purported to be a single throne, Nguyen lords actually held sway south of a line approximately equivalent to the 17th parallel, while north of that line Trinh Nobles exercised *de facto* control. Contemporary writers referred to the Trinh principality as Tongking (Tonkin) and the Nguyen realm as Cochin China. However, later usage, including French administrative nomenclature, employed "Cochin China" as the name for the most southerly region of modern Viet Nam, including the Mekong delta and the provinces immediately north and east of Saigon. The central portion of modern Viet Nam came to be known as Annam. The remainder of North Viet Nam retained the name of Tongking. Tongking, Annam and Cochin China became the three great *ky* or regions into which the ethnic Vietnamese were administratively and, in French years, politically divided. Despite a large measure of cultural homogeneity among all ethnic Viets, each of these regions has a distinctive dialect, some unique customs and strong local loyalties.

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During the latter part of the eighteenth century, both Vietnamese principalities were racked by a series of insurrections and civil wars known as the Tay Son revolt. In these troubled times, the pretender to the southern throne—Nguyen Anh—had to flee for his life. During his wanderings as a fugitive in Camau, he met and was sheltered by another remarkable Frenchman, Msgr. Pigneau de Behaine, Apostolic Vicar of Cochin China. The energetic bishop became the pretender's adviser and champion. In 1787 Msgr. Pigneau went to Paris, accompanied by the pretender's young son, to enlist official support for the Nguyen cause. With the somewhat reluctant blessing of Louis XVI (who had mounting problems of his own), a treaty was signed promising French aid in return for certain territorial and trade concessions. With the treaty and funds obtained in Paris, the bishop eventually raised a mercenary contingent which tipped the tide of battle in Nguyen Anh's favor.

With this aid provided through the efforts of a French bishop, and with the support of Vietnamese Catholics who rallied to his cause, Nguyen Anh ultimately conquered virtually all of modern Viet Nam. At Hué, in 1802, he proclaimed himself the Emperor Gia Long—founding a dynasty which reigned until its last member, Bao Dai, was deposed in 1955.

Gia Long himself was grateful for the foreign assistance which brought him to power and at his death in 1820 ordered that there was to be no persecution of the three religions then established in his empire—i.e. Confucianism, Buddhism and Christianity. His virulently anti-foreign successors, however, ignored this edict. From time to time they permitted or initiated repressive actions against French missionary priests and pogroms against Vietnamese Catholics. These actions, in turn, provoked ever sharper responses from the French Government. Matters came to a head during the reign of the xenophobic Emperor Tu Duc (1848–1883). After an initial period of hesitation, he made the political blunder of launching a particularly brutal campaign against Vietnamese Catholics and foreign missionaries at a time when France was itching for an excuse to seize territory in Viet Nam. The murder of a Spanish bishop in 1857 prompted a Franco-Spanish reaction which suffered numerous reverses but finally (in 1862) forced Tu Duc to cede Cochin China's three eastern provinces to France. During this period, a French bishop's relations with Prince Norodom caused Cambodia to become a French

protectorate in 1864. In 1866, France occupied the remainder of Cochin China by advancing to the now French-protected Cambodian border. (Further French territorial expansion was not undertaken until after the Franco-Prussian war, and when it was, less stress was laid on the *raison d'être* of protecting foreign missionaries and their Vietnamese flocks.)

This whole complex and bloody story developed animosities which still plague Vietnamese political life. Among Vietnamese Catholics it engendered a sense of clannishness, alienation from their non-Catholic compatriots and an understandable fear of persecution. Among non-Catholic Vietnamese, however, it engendered a sentiment epitomized by the saying attributed to one of Tu Duc's most powerful mandarins, *viz.* that Vietnamese Catholics served as the claws which enabled the French crab to crawl across the land.

French political control over all of Indochina was finally established in the last decade of the nineteenth century and was institutionalized as a five-part whole under the supervisory aegis of a Governor General. Cochin China remained an avowed colony, Annam and Tongking were separate "protectorates" (as were Laos and Cambodia, which we shall henceforth ignore). The Emperor and Court were maintained at Hué for the sake of form but without any substantial power and under close French supervision. France ruled her Indochinese domains through a complicated combination of direct and indirect controls, the details of which varied from region to region. In Viet Nam, particularly Annam, much ostensible authority at the local level—along with the attendant onus of enforcing unpopular decrees—was left in the hands of trusted Vietnamese guided by French "advisers." Lip service was paid to the principle of "association," but since France never had any intention of preparing her colonial protégés for self-government, the operative form of association proved to be "assimilation"—a process whereby certain favored Vietnamese could become French citizens. (Not surprisingly, "assimilés" were more common in Cochin China than in Annam or Tongking.) Educational opportunities were limited, particularly in the higher ranges, and as carefully controlled as possible. Higher education was French education (the traditional Vietnamese competitive examinations for the mandarinat were abolished) and hence required a fluency in the French language as well as an intensive exposure to French cultural concepts. None of this,

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of course, prevented the rise of anti-French nationalist political sentiments (virtually all twentieth-century Vietnamese revolutionary leaders have spoken impeccable French). However, it did produce one easily overlooked but very important result: the political thoughts of the products of this educational system were unconsciously cast in a foreign idiom often ill-adapted to the realities of Vietnamese political life.

The upshot of the various factors outlined above was that during the period of French rule, actual experience in even the forms of exercising political power was limited to members of landed or mandarin families (*e.g.* Diem) and the education needed to articulate and manipulate political concepts was largely confined, if not to children of mandarins, then at least to scions of the wealthy or aristocratic bourgeoisie (*e.g.* Ho Chi Minh). The Vietnamese political leaders who emerged during the colonial era—whatever their individual doctrines or programs—tended by and large to come from the same segment of Vietnamese urban society. Not that the French encouraged the development of Vietnamese political leadership. Indeed, they actively discouraged it. Known or suspected opponents of French rule were kept under surveillance and often summarily imprisoned. More subtly, but with greater lasting damage, the French employed the control tactic of “divide and rule” by encouraging localism, particularism and squabbling disunity—attitudes to which the Vietnamese have been inherently addicted throughout their history, often to the detriment of their political fortunes.

World War II stimulated a surge of nationalism throughout Southeast Asia. The combination of metropolitan defeat and Japanese humiliation of the pro-Vichy colonial government did irreparable damage to French prestige in Indochina. Allied confusion and lack of foresight helped the Communists seize control of the Vietnamese nationalist movement and profit from the near anarchy resulting from the precipitate Japanese surrender by installing themselves at least temporarily in power. De Gaulle might have had the perceptivity to assess the force of Vietnamese nationalism and the acumen to cope with it. His successors, who acted as if nothing had happened in Indochina between May 1940 and August 1945, were not equal to the task. French intransigence on the question of even considering eventual independence helped assure a Viet Minh victory. The French attitude also stifled the growth and development of genuinely

nationalist but anti-Communist political leadership and left anti-Communist nationalists with the unhappy choices of exile, the Viet Minh or sterile *attentisme*.

In the aftermath of French defeat, foreign fiat at Geneva created the state of South Viet Nam, drawing its borders to include Cochinchina and the southern half of Annam. Ngo Dinh Diem became South Viet Nam's first Premier, and, in 1955, its Chief of State. Diem's personal ethos was a blend of traditional Vietnamese values and devout Catholicism. Although a member of the class of Vietnamese Catholic mandarins who had prospered under French rule, he himself was an intense nationalist and lifelong opponent of French political domination. (His nationalist sentiments had led him to resign from Bao Dai's cabinet in 1933 and refuse the Premiership when it was offered him in 1948 with what he considered unacceptable French restrictions.) When he came to power he had a general reputation for patriotism and personal integrity, but his active, organized supporters were primarily Catholics from Central Viet Nam. This group remained one of Diem's two principal sources of support. The other consisted of militantly anti-Communist—though, again, predominantly Catholic—refugees from North Viet Nam. Diem's early years in office were full of promise and marked by significant accomplishments achieved in the face of innumerable difficulties. The course of his later years evolved in the manner and eventually with the inexorability of a Greek tragedy, only one aspect of which need be dealt with here.

In non-Catholic Vietnamese eyes, the Catholic cast of Diem's régime increased rather than diminished with the passage of time. Its quasi-covert political organization, the Can Lao Party, was controlled by Catholics; its official philosophy of "personalism" (developed by Diem's brother Ngo Dinh Nhu) owed obvious extensive debts to French Catholic thinkers and was expounded to government officials at an institute presided over by another brother, Archbishop Thuc. In 1958, a law actively sponsored by Diem's sister-in-law Mme. Ngo Dinh Nhu imposed on marriage, divorce and family relationships strictures consonant with Catholic doctrine but very much against the grain of Vietnamese tradition in these emotionally charged areas. (The adverse political impact of this "Family Bill" was augmented by a widespread suspicion that its primary object was to stop Nguyen Huu Chau from divorcing Mme. Nhu's sister.) In 1962, a similar "Law for

the Protection of Morality," also sponsored by Mme. Nhu, generated additional resentment over what was widely construed as governmental imposition of narrow and puritanical "Catholic morality" on non-Catholics who constituted the overwhelming majority of South Viet Nam's population. (This resentment was heightened by subsequent edicts banning such things as traditional, and popular, "sentimental songs.") In 1959, the Diem government sponsored a country-wide series of elaborate Marian Year celebrations culminating in a solemn ceremony in front of the Saigon Cathedral at which South Viet Nam was formally consecrated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The extent to which Catholics appeared to obtain preferment in civil and military life—something actually due to many causes, frequently including better education—generated the widespread belief that at least nominal conversion to Catholicism was a requirement for advancement. There was very little actual religious persecution, but the religious sensibilities of non-Catholics were often slighted, sometimes as a result of excessive zeal on the part of subordinate officials, more often as a result of thoughtlessness rather than deliberate official intent to harass. Furthermore, though non-Catholics were not persecuted, there were many signs that could be construed or misconstrued as evidence of disproportionate official partiality for Catholics and Catholicism.

Bit by bit a plethora of incidents, events, practices and policies—many of them almost certainly unintentional or accidental—laid the groundwork for a "religious issue" on which non-Communist but also non-Catholic opposition to Diem could, and eventually did, focus. This was not something that suddenly happened in the spring of 1963. Instead, it was something that had been gradually building up almost from the day Diem took office.

The historical context sketched above may help explain why anti-Catholicism, once surfaced, can arouse such strong emotions in non-Catholic Vietnamese. It does not explain why Diem's opponents rallied behind the standard "Buddhism," particularly since the number of devout, actively practicing Buddhists in South Viet Nam probably does not greatly exceed the number of practicing Catholics. To understand this phenomenon, and the present political strength of South Viet Nam's "Buddhist" movement, we must briefly trace another current in Vietnamese history.



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## III

Though there is some dispute over the precise dates, Mahayana Buddhism appears to have come to Viet Nam from China during the middle of the period of Chinese domination which lasted from 111 B.C. to 939 A.D.<sup>2</sup> Along with Buddhism, the Chinese introduced other religious doctrines including Confucianism and Taoism. All of these imported beliefs underwent considerable modification in Viet Nam, however, and all were in large measure compounded with animism and primitive spirit worship, particularly among the rural population. The future religious structure of Viet Nam was significantly influenced by the fact that the rulers of the first stable and independent Vietnamese dynasty—that of the Ly (1009–1225)—were ardent Buddhists. Under their reign, official sponsorship of Buddhism and cooperation between Viet Nam's rulers and the Buddhist clergy reached a high point never subsequently equalled. The identification of the Ly with Vietnamese Buddhism is not without current political significance, for the Ly were among the greatest nationalists in Vietnamese history. They successfully fended off the Chinese to the north, pushed back the Chams to the south and curbed foreign (*i.e.* Chinese) political influence. Even in modern Vietnamese eyes they have a legendary aura, some of which extends to the Buddhist faith with which they were so intimately identified.

The downfall of the Ly initiated a long period of decline in Buddhism's political fortunes. During the ensuing centuries there were occasional revivals of Buddhist influence, though these were generally followed by repression. One of the strongest such revivals occurred during the seventeenth century when Catholicism was rapidly winning converts as a result of energetic Jesuit activity, and, for a time, Buddhism was more or less officially encouraged as a "nationalist" counter to this foreign doctrine. From the fifteenth century onward, however, a form of Confucianism was the official state or court cult—a fact which inhibited the institutional development of Buddhism. In principalities such as Ceylon, Burma, Siam and Cambodia, where Theravada Buddhism enjoyed centuries of status as a state religion, it evolved an effective and fairly disciplined hierarchical structure. For both doctrinal and political reasons, Mahayana Buddhism in Viet Nam

<sup>2</sup> Virtually all ethnic Vietnamese Buddhists adhere to some Mahayana sect. The Khmer, however, were converted to Theravada (Hinayana) Buddhism in the early thirteenth century. There are Theravada Buddhist sects in present-day South Viet Nam, but the overwhelming majority of their followers are ethnic Cambodians, known as Khmer Krom.

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followed the opposite course and became increasingly marked by organizational weakness and doctrinal diversity.

At various times, particularly during the second decade of this century, attempts were made to form regional and national Buddhist associations, but these never became much more than the loosest of affiliations between essentially autonomous local pagodas. The surge of nationalism throughout Asia after World War II produced, among other things, a revived interest in Buddhist unity and cooperation which contributed significantly to the founding of the World Buddhist Federation in 1951. In that same year, a General Association of Vietnamese Buddhists was organized in Viet Nam. This organization provided an institutional mechanism for a reciprocal exchange of Buddhist views and at least adumbrated the idea of religious unity among the various Buddhist sects, though it was far more impressive on paper than it ever became in fact.

The doctrinal diversity and weakness of organizational structure in Vietnamese Buddhism, however, both contributed to and obscured certain latent strengths and potential emotional appeal. When Buddhism was banished from the court it subsided into the ranks of the people and, over passing centuries, there developed an autochthonous character and aura. Furthermore, having been rejected by the court, it was not involved in, nor were its fortunes adversely affected by, the court's eventual decline and dissipation. Buddhism, in short, became something uniquely Vietnamese, adapted to local situations and free of foreign political taint. Despite the relatively small number of Vietnamese actively engaged in Buddhist affairs, "Buddhism" developed into a religious idea with which the overwhelming majority of the Vietnamese populace had at least some vague sense of emotional identification. The rise and activities of the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao sects gave some indication of the potential political strength of religious ideas in tune with local attitudes and aspirations. Buddhism, with its much broader base, was an even stronger latent political force.

As indicated above, certain historical factors, combined with the character and practices of the Diem régime, laid the groundwork for a "religious" issue over which political opposition to the Ngo family could swiftly coalesce. The spark which ignited the powder was struck in Hué on May 8, 1963, under circumstances whose details will probably always remain matters of controversy

but whose general outlines are sufficiently well known to require no rehearsal here. In the ensuing months of political struggle, the Buddhists displayed hitherto unsuspected organizational and political talents. Using the shell of the aforementioned General Association, an "Inter-Sect Committee" was swiftly formed, partly to negotiate with the government but primarily to coordinate anti-government political activities. The name of Thich Tinh Kiet<sup>3</sup>—a revered octogenarian bonze and president of the General Association—was invoked as the "leader" of the movement, but it soon became apparent that the real leadership was in the hands of militant younger bonzes including Thich Duc Nghiep, Thich Tam Chau and, above all, Thich Tri Quang, the bonze from Hué who had been intimately involved in precipitating the May 8 incident. The Buddhist leadership was never free from discord or cross-currents of personal rivalry, but it proved sufficiently cohesive to contribute significantly to the downfall of the Diem régime.

The "Buddhist" movement was and remains considerably more concerned with political issues than matters of religious doctrine. Its leaders have displayed an instinctive touch for public relations, and in the anti-Diem campaign took full advantage of their generally favorable foreign press. Sure theatrical hands have almost certainly stage-managed much ostensibly spontaneous protest and agitation. The breadth of the Buddhist leaders' actual political mandate is open to question. (The political aspirations of the participants in any mass movement are often at variance with the articulated opinions of their self-appointed leaders.) Granting all this and more, however, the fact remains that the "Buddhist" movement has become one of the most potent political forces in South Viet Nam. Accidents of history and circumstance have made "Buddhism" the focus and rallying symbol not only of political opposition to Catholic dominance but, more importantly, of inchoate nationalist aspirations, including a desire to be rid of alien doctrine and to find a "Vietnamese" solution to South Viet Nam's political problems.

#### IV

The mounting pressures which, in November 1963, had their by then inevitable result did far more than depose Diem, his family and régime. They also brushed aside the frail constitu-

<sup>3</sup> Thich means literally "the Venerable"—a religious title roughly equivalent to "Reverend."

tional edifice established by that régime to institutionalize its rule, and, further, broke the monopoly of political influence to which the class whence Diem came had fallen heir in the aftermath of the French departure. In so doing, they threw South Viet Nam into a still continuing state of political ferment and precipitated a social revolution in which new figures and factions have emerged to contend for power; the position of formerly predominant groups has been radically altered.

The most complex and enigmatic of the emergent new forces is the group of militant bonzes who lead the "Buddhist" movement. Their formidable present political power—whose exercise they have found so heady and habit-forming—has derived from a masterful skill in directing the articulation of emotionally charged protest. It has yet to be tested in the more difficult field of constructive advocacy. These bonzes will certainly remain hypersensitive to any real or fancied recrudescence of "neo-Diemist" or "Catholic" political authority and to any potential threat to "Buddhism," which they are prone to identify with their own prestige and wishes. They seem anxious to avoid the responsibilities of political office but determined to have a veto over government policies and choices of personnel. Factionalism and personal rivalries among the Buddhist leaders make their positive goals harder to ascertain, particularly since, as in most protest movements, no contender for primacy will let a rival appear more "militant" than he.

At the moment, Thich Tri Quang seems to have outmaneuvered his colleagues and become at least *primus inter pares* within the Buddhist movement. His many enemies call him a Communist or, at best, pro-neutralist; he himself denies these charges and claims to recognize that Buddhism would get short shrift under any Communist régime. He is obviously ambitious and nationalistic to the point of xenophobia. Significantly, he is the first major Vietnamese political figure to emerge in 50 years who makes a point of professing not to speak any foreign language. There is little question that over the long run he would like to see Viet Nam free of all foreign influence. How this long-range aspiration will affect his short-term tactics and attitudes remains to be seen.

November 1963 left many Catholics dismayed at their sudden loss of governmental protection and patronage. A few were unwilling to accept the fact that the old order had changed; many more were understandably nervous at their now exposed position

amidst a non-Catholic majority that in some instances proved more than potentially hostile. Though not a monolithic bloc, by and large the Catholics are apprehensive, distrust the Buddhist leadership—particularly Tri Quang—and fear a neutralist settlement that would deliver them into Communist hands. Most of their leaders recognize the delicacy of their present position, but some militants are undoubtedly considering preëemptive moves and will become increasingly inclined to think in such terms if they see the Catholic position deteriorating or become personally desperate. (Militant Catholics, particularly Army officers unable to reconcile themselves to the Diem régime's ouster, played a prominent role in the abortive coups of September 1964 and February 1965.) The other religious groups generally welcomed Diem's downfall. The Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao have emerged from nearly a decade of political insignificance to play influential roles, particularly in the provinces where their adherents are concentrated. Neither group has very much influence at the national level, though Chief of State Pham Khac Suu is a Cao Dai.

The now volatile and intensely nationalistic students (relatively docile and quiescent until the summer of 1963) have continued to experiment with the pleasures of political agitation. In weighing their aspirations we must recognize that 11 years have passed since the spring of 1954, hence the present student generation has spent at least its adolescence in a Vietnamese, not a French-dominated, educational system. By and large they tend to identify themselves emotionally with the "Buddhist" cause, but they are subject to manipulation from many quarters. Most of all, they seem to be potential followers searching for new leaders with Vietnamese answers to Viet Nam's difficulties.

Diem's erstwhile civilian political opponents—at least those not too openly tainted with Communist or French associations—have emerged from jail, exile and obscurity to plunge into the political mêlée. Old party and factional labels have been dusted off and quarrels shelved during the Diem era enthusiastically renewed—though these labels and quarrels now have an archaic aura and bear little relevance to current political realities. A few civilian politicians have served honorably—albeit sometimes briefly—in high office. Many have displayed the unfortunate effects of early habits patterned after the examples of Third- and Fourth-Republic French politicians and have been unable to dissipate the miasma of opposition or émigré salons. The old political personali-

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ties vary widely in ability, popular appeal and the esteem of their peers. None has yet sparked any real mass enthusiasm and when new leadership emerges it will probably not come from this quarter.

The political influence of the groups mentioned above derives in no small measure from the fact that they are articulate and visibly active. Urban society also includes other elements, however, whose sentiments and aspirations are less well known, especially to foreign observers, but who can easily play key roles at critical junctures in political life, particularly in the present fluid situation. Beyond the limits of the towns are other significant groups—the montagnards and, above all, the ethnic Vietnamese peasantry—who have not been directly involved in urban ferment but whose loyalties and actions, over the long run, will probably determine South Viet Nam's political future.

The military establishment actually executed the 1963 coup and has since retained ultimate political power, a fact which has conditioned all subsequent civilian political activity. The military establishment itself, however, has not been free from the revolutionary ferment that its actions set in train. In civilian life, the ex-aristocrats, wealthy landowners and French-educated intelligentsia have suffered a loss of status. In military circles, the past year has been marked by rising tension between "older" officers (meaning those past their thirties), who received their training and early command experience in French Union forces, and younger officers whose careers have been almost entirely spent in the U.S.-advised South Vietnamese military establishment.

Most of the senior officers who deposed Diem were, in turn, themselves ousted by General Khanh. For a time, military factionalism seemed to polarize around Generals Khanh, Khiem and Duong Van Minh. The events of August and September 1964 put Khanh out of political office but left him firmly established as Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, with Khiem and Duong Van Minh out of the country. During 1964, however, a new and younger military group began to emerge, unfortunately if inevitably labeled the "Young Turks." In the spring and summer they seemed to be one of General Khanh's main sources of support; in September, they proved his salvation. After that, however, they became—collectively—his most potent rivals. Though they prevented the February 1965 coup from succeeding, in its wake they led the move to strip Khanh of his military authority.

Below the Young Turks an even more junior group may well be forming. This restlessness within the military establishment is of course not the product of any single or simple cause. Personal ambitions play a role; so, too, do religious beliefs, concern over—or emotional identification with—the activities of various civilian groups, irritation at the lack of political progress and frustration over the course of the war. As yet this restlessness does not seem to have produced any element of defeatism or desire for accommodation with the enemy. Instead, an ardent and truculent nationalism and touchy sense of national pride seem to be traits common to all significant military factions.

## v

The attitudes and politics of the military and civil groups mentioned above are all complicated by sentiments of regionalism, which are easy for a foreign observer to overlook but almost impossible for a Vietnamese to escape. With one brief exception, the Vietnamese people have never really been united since Nguyen Hoang left Trinh-ruled Tongking in 1600 to found a principality that subsequently became Annam. (The exception is the 60-year interval between Nguyen Anh's accession as Emperor in 1802 and Tu Duc's secession of Cochin China's three eastern provinces to France.) Even when the Annamite Nguyens reigned in Hué, Viet Nam was divided into its three great *ky*, with separate and powerful viceroys governing Tongking and Cochin China.

History and geography have interacted among the Vietnamese people to produce what in effect are three regionally oriented sub-cultures. It was in the Red River delta of Tongking that the ethnic Viets emerged as an identifiably separate people; and the Tongkinese are still inclined to think of themselves as the natural leaders of all Viet Nam, an attitude resented by both Annamites and Cochin Chinese. Annam had the least amount of direct French governance and has remained the most traditionalist of the three regions, as well as the area in which religious emotions—both Buddhist and Catholic—are probably strongest. Cochin China is unique in several respects. The ethnic Viets who began settling there and wresting its possession from the Khmers in the seventeenth century bore a relationship to their northern kinsmen similar in many respects to the relationship between homeland Europeans and the colonists who were settling the eastern seaboard of the United States at about the same period. Cochin

China was the first region to come under French control and it became the area most culturally influenced by direct French rule.

The influences of regionalism have had and still have a profound effect on Vietnamese political allegiances and programs. Often they provide a rationale for developments that foreigners, unaware of their importance, find inexplicable. The energetic, industrious and predominantly Catholic Tongkinese refugees who came south in 1954 are still regarded by their Annamite and, particularly, Cochin Chinese cousins much as seventeenth century Englishmen regarded the Scots who came south with James I. Rivalry within the Buddhist movement, for example, is sharpened by the fact that Thich Tam Chau's supporters are primarily Tongkinese refugees, whereas Thich Tri Quang's followers are predominantly Annamite (though Tri Quang himself is from Tongking). Cochin Chinese, Annamite and Tongkinese cliques exist in every politically significant group: the Buddhists, the Catholics, the students, the civilian politicians and the military establishment. Everywhere they produce a jealous watchfulness over the regional balances struck with regard to advantage, preferment and influence.

Vietnamese politics are further complicated by the lack of any unifying traditional symbols or accepted institutions capable of channeling disagreement and containing tests of relative strength. There is, to begin with, no tradition of loyalty to a government in Saigon in the sense that there was some tradition of loyalty to an Emperor in Hué. Diem's constitutional edifice was patently patterned on a French model and had no roots in Vietnamese soil. The various patchwork façades constructed for the sake of appearances since his demise have been equally artificial and no more substantial. Nor are there really any organized political parties in the Western sense of the word. Party names abound, including ones of honorable lineage, but what are claimed to be parties can be described more accurately as the relatively small personal factions of rival politicians, none of whom seems to have any extensive following. Indeed, though Tran Quoc Buu's trade-union confederation (the C.T.V.) may be an exception, only the Buddhists now seem to have any effective mass organization.

A myriad of emotions, ambitions and loyalties swirl through the currents of conflict we have sketchily charted. Many Vietnamese are undoubtedly secret Communist sympathizers, others probably mourn the departure of the French, and yet others certainly



still resent the toppling of Diem and all that he symbolized. Frustration, fatigue and weariness of unending civil war are obviously abroad in the land. So, too, is some neutralist sentiment, though this is hard to measure and easy to exaggerate. (Foreign observers in any country must avoid confusing the articulate with the representative.) Much more pervasive, probably, is the caution developed through a lifetime of turmoil which inhibits too strong a commitment to any side and, for self-preservation, reinsures against all contingencies. Yet resolution is present too, along with direct awareness of what the Communists are actually like, what life under their control can be, and what their version of "neutralism" or "negotiation" really means. Fear and the fanaticism it can breed are also in evidence, particularly among refugees who have already fled from Communist rule and know what a Communist victory will hold for them.

In all of the groups we have mentioned—particularly the Buddhists, the students and the younger military officers—politically portentous and potentially explosive nationalist emotions are rapidly rising: inchoate, complicated by regional perspectives, but none the less intense, and at least latently xenophobic. Basically these emotions derive from a desire to find and assert a *Vietnamese* identity. They are impelling a confused but profoundly significant quest for a set of political arrangements tempered to Vietnamese needs, adapted to Vietnamese realities and consonant with Vietnamese traditions. To date, this rising nationalism has not been focused as anti-Americanism, though the danger of such a development will always be present and will probably be heightened from time to time (as it has been already) by short-sighted tactical manoeuvres on the part of sometimes recklessly ambitious contenders for power. As in the past, the Communists will endeavor without surcease to transmute nationalist emotions into anti-American feeling and will do everything possible to foment and exacerbate tensions between South Viet Nam and her principal ally. Yet the Communists must know what we should never forget: it is they who have the most to fear from genuine nationalism which develops in a manner they cannot contain and control.

Since November 1963, South Viet Nam has witnessed a succession of coups, demi-coups, demonstrations and governmental changes bewildering to the casual observer and suggestive of an inherent incapacity for self-government. This surface turmoil has not been entirely aimless or feckless, however, and the kaleido-

scopic sequence of recent events does have a certain inner logic. What we are witnessing is a fundamental shift in the locus of urban political power and a basic realignment of political forces—in short, a revolution. The development of this revolution has involved a testing of relative strengths and tentative trials of new balances amidst the pressures of civil war and in a context where no traditional symbols or institutions can channel or contain political disagreement. This process has been chaotic and untidy, and will probably so continue, since the revolution responsible for it has probably not yet been completed. This revolution is not presently subject to any group's conscious control and is probably beyond anyone's power to stop. Its eventual outcome will determine South Viet Nam's political future for decades to come.

## VI

The revolution we are witnessing in South Viet Nam should not be confused with the Hanoi-directed Communist insurgency, though the Communists will labor mightily to ensure that it is so confused (particularly in foreign eyes), will take credit for it and will try to turn it to their advantage. The insurgency contributed to the climate which precipitated this revolution, has complicated its issues and heightened its pressures—but the two are not the same.

The present insurgency is but the latest phase in the 40-year campaign which the leadership of the Indochinese Communist Party<sup>4</sup> has waged to acquire complete political control over all of Viet Nam, hegemony over Laos and some form of suzerainty over Cambodia. This campaign has been carried on relentlessly, ruthlessly and with great tactical flexibility. It has been waged through a protean variety of organizational forms and has made extensive, effective use of successive "front" devices—the Viet Minh League, the Lien Viet, the Fatherland Front and, currently, the "National Front for the Liberation of South Viet Nam"—each of which has been successful in deceiving Vietnamese and, especially, foreign observers.

During the 1930s the Communists were weak and their organi-

<sup>4</sup>Over the years, this leadership has (so far) been remarkably stable. The Indochinese Communist Party was virtually the personal creation of one man and has always faltered when his guiding hand was not at its helm. That man, of course, was born with the name of Nguyen Van Thanh (or, possibly, Nguyen Van Cung), took the pen name of Nguyen Ai Quoc ("Nguyen the Patriot") while in Paris at the time of the Versailles Conference, and in 1942, while under arrest in Nationalist China, adopted his present pseudonym of Ho Chi Minh ("the one who enlightens").

zation small, but they were the unintended beneficiaries of savage French repression against their most potent nationalist rivals, the V.N.Q.D.D. With the witting if short-sighted assistance of the Nationalist Governor of Kwangsi, the Communists took over the Vietnamese independence and resistance movement which the Chinese Nationalists were sponsoring during World War II in order to harass the Japanese (who moved into Indochina in 1940). This movement, which became the Viet Minh, even received some American assistance and support on the strength of its supposed intelligence-collecting activities and guerrilla operations against the Japanese. Actually, efforts of the Communists during this period were devoted primarily to readying themselves for postwar contingencies and they were very careful not to provoke Japanese action which might interfere with these longer-term preparations. Most of such Communist military activity as was then undertaken was directed against bands of Vietnamese nationalist rivals.

In the confused aftermath of the Japanese surrender, the Communists temporarily assumed power and for about a year conducted stalling negotiations with the returning French. During this interval, the Communists relentlessly carried on their efforts to liquidate all nationalist rivals, betraying many to the French police, murdering others themselves (*e.g.* Huynh Phu So, founder of the Hoa Hao, and Diem's brother Ngo Dinh Khoi), and, with tacit French blessing, mounting military operations against anti-French resistance groups not under absolute Communist control. By the time country-wide hostilities broke out in December 1946, the Communists had usurped the nationalist cause and acquired complete domination over the independence movement. In a textbook example of Lenin's two-stage theory, they led this movement to victory by stressing the theme of national independence, then established a Communist régime in that portion of Viet Nam given over to their control by the 1954 Geneva settlement.

In mid-1954, the leaders of the Indochinese Communist Party (now called the Lao Dong) had installed themselves in Hanoi as the rulers of the "Democratic Republic of North Viet Nam." Like most observers, they expected South Viet Nam to disintegrate politically and fall inevitably under Communist domination via the Geneva-directed elections scheduled for 1956. They were in no hurry and had other immediate claims on their attention, *e.g.* the problems of consolidating control over the North and restructuring North Vietnamese society along Communist lines.

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*What does this mean?*

Diem, however, accomplished the impossible, successfully defied the election deadline and made it obvious that South Viet Nam had a chance to survive. Accordingly, in 1957 Hanoi instigated a small-scale program of insurrectionary subversion in South Viet Nam in order to give the inevitable course of history a helping hand. This campaign built up slowly but steadily until the fall of 1960, when Hanoi apparently decided that something more would be required. In September 1960 at a Lao Dong party congress in Hanoi, First Secretary Le Duan called for the creation of a "broad united front" to achieve Communist objectives in South Viet Nam, though he did not put it quite that candidly. Soon thereafter the National Liberation Front appeared on the scene, with a manifesto which embodied a virtual paraphrase of Le Duan's speech. At that point, the scale and intensity of the Communist subversive campaign began to increase by quantum jumps, and within a year became what it is today—a full-fledged civil war supported and directed by the Communist leaders in Hanoi in order to further their political ambitions.

The Communists, naturally, have never admitted that this was the real sequence of events. Instead, they have tried to portray the insurgency in South Viet Nam as a spontaneous and indigenous (*i.e.* South Vietnamese) continuation of the nationalist revolution which ousted the French but could not be completed because the French were replaced by the American "imperialist aggressors." Communist tactics, military and, especially, political, have been skillful and successful.

The Communists took full advantage of the disorder in South Viet Nam and the shortcomings of the Diem régime. To date they have had relatively little success in selling the line that the Americans are successor imperialists to the French, but they have made headway by concentrating on the peasantry and stressing the not entirely inexact theme that all Saigon governments have been urban-oriented instruments of the rich and landed. Regionalism is particularly powerful among the Vietnamese peasantry, where in fact it appears in the even more restricted form of localism. The average peasant's horizons are bounded by his village, his rice-fields and the tombs of his ancestors. Wherever possible, the Communists have made this deep-rooted emotion work to their advantage by employing cadre and troops native to the areas in which they operate. This sentiment, by and large, has worked against Saigon régimes—particularly Diem's—which have usu-

ally assigned provincial administrators with regional backgrounds different from those of the peasants under their charge.

The turmoil of the past year engendered by South Viet Nam's urban revolution and its attendant governmental instability has obviously been to the Communists' short-term advantage and has been exploited by them on every possible occasion. Furthermore, the Communists have almost certainly penetrated at least some of the contending groups and factions. Nevertheless, the Communists did not start this revolution, nor do they yet control it. It is also a development of which they have every reason to be mortally afraid.

This revolution involves a quest for Vietnamese answers to Viet Nam's political problems. No answers could be less Vietnamese, none could be more alien to everything basic and deep-rooted in Vietnamese tradition, than those offered by Communist doctrine. Vietnamese mores and values evolved over the centuries in a culture based on the cultivation of rice—a seasonal thing, requiring many hands at certain times of the year, though at other times these essential workers have little to do and represent mouths that someone must feed. In response to these needs, the Vietnamese developed a society whose strongest institutions are the extended family and private property. The latter is a reflection of the peasant's immemorial attachment to the land he tills. The former provides a social institution to support otherwise idle hands which are needed at seedtime and harvest.

Communism is doctrinally committed to the abolition of both of these institutions and hence runs directly against the grain of the most elemental and basic of all Vietnamese traditions. Hanoi's Communism, furthermore, is under Chinese patronage, and opposition to Chinese domination is one of the great, continuing themes of Vietnamese history. In short, if those involved in Viet Nam's present revolution should or could ever look clearly at the real issues involved, they would realize what some, indeed, seem to have already realized: that Communism and a Communist-controlled government involve the negation of everything for which they are consciously and unconsciously striving.

## VII

Predictions are rash, particularly when the subject is contemporary South Viet Nam, and may be proved wrong tomorrow. The fragility of the present situation would be hard to overstate.

There are real dangers that the revolution now in process will tear South Viet Nam apart or be halted, if not ended, by a Communist victory materially aided by the turmoil it has generated. The participants in this revolution are impelled by a variety of motives, not all of them idealistic or ingenuous. Some may be actively working for a Communist victory even though they loudly profess otherwise. Others may make the error many have made, and endeavor to form an alliance with the Communists with the intent of outwitting them or using them "temporarily." Political division and strife may enable the Communists to gain a military advantage virtually impossible to overcome. Viet Nam could be on the verge of repeating the Chinese experience of 1948 and 1949.

Yet despite all these undeniable and persuasive arguments for pessimism, the fact remains that Viet Nam has always had a way of confounding both domestic and foreign prophets. If the revolutionary process now in train should somehow work itself out and, in so doing, produce a political balance arrived at by the Vietnamese themselves—a balance embodied in an institutional framework adapted to Vietnamese needs and realities and supported by the rising emotions of Vietnamese nationalism—then this revolution could eventually hold hope for more genuine stability and strength than any South Vietnamese government has ever known. If regeneration of the urban center could then somehow be carried outward to the provinces by a Saigon government able to enlist the support of rising nationalist sentiments—one with which the peasantry could identify its fortunes—the counter-insurgency program would be well launched on the road to genuine progress. In sum, if South Viet Nam's real revolution does not destroy the country first, over the longer term it may prove the eventual undoing of Communist ambitions and produce a real national entity where none has heretofore existed.